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SPECIAL ANALYSIS

USSR-EUROPE: Conference of Communist Parties

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The Soviet-inspired Conference of European Communist Parties that opens today in Paris under French and Polish sponsorship is intended, in part, to demonstrate broad Communist support in Europe for disarmament and East-West detente despite the setback of Afghanistan. The success of the conference is already in doubt, however, because several major West and East European parties have refused to participate. Although Moscow may have hoped the conference would put pressure on some dissident parties to conform, the meeting probably will only underline and intensify the disunity among European Communists. [REDACTED]

The Soviets first broached the idea of such a meeting last June as a means of stimulating support in West Europe for the SALT II Treaty and future SALT III negotiations. The NATO decision in December on theater nuclear forces gave it considerable added impetus. [REDACTED]

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Eurocommunist Differences

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Moscow's opposition to the Italian Communists' independent stance had been intensified by party leader Berlinguer's criticism of the invasion of Afghanistan and by what the Soviets regarded as the Italian party's weak opposition to TNF. The Italians, in turn, have said that they will not attend the conference because it is "wrong in method, timing, and theme."

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This proscription presumably also applies to the Spanish Communist Party, which has joined the Italians in refusing to attend the Paris Conference.

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The Communist parties of the UK, the Netherlands, and San Marino, as well as the Swedish Left Party, also will boycott the session. The Belgian Communist Party will attend only as an observer.

East European Parties

If things go as the Soviets plan, the conference will mark the first endorsement by high-level Warsaw Pact country officials--albeit without the Romanians--of Moscow's policy in Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, some of the East European parties that are attending probably have reservations about the conference.

The Hungarians and the Poles may not be enthusiastic about publicly endorsing Soviet policy on Afghanistan in such a forum, but they will go along. They will be concerned, however, over any attempt to isolate the

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Italian, Spanish, and Yugoslav parties. Polish and Hungarian delegates probably will attempt to tone down any criticism directed at the absent parties. [REDACTED]

The Poles probably were happy to cosponsor the conference [REDACTED]
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The Yugoslav and Romanian boycotts stem from a belief that Moscow will use the gathering not only to obtain an across-the-board endorsement of its policies but will also attempt to reestablish its domination of the international Communist movement. Both countries oppose the invasion of Afghanistan and maintain close ties with the Italian and Spanish parties. [REDACTED]

Belgrade and Bucharest also object to the abrupt manner in which the agenda and declaration of the conference were drawn up by the Soviets without prior consultation. Belgrade has even criticized this tactic as a violation of the agreements reached at the conference of European Communist parties in East Berlin in 1976. [REDACTED]

Romania's decision not to attend was particularly difficult because of its Warsaw Pact membership. If the other independent Communist parties had gone, the Romanians also would have participated and complained about objectionable resolutions--as they did in 1976. After waiting for almost all parties to declare whether they would attend, however, Bucharest decided that it did not want to be the lone dissenting voice. [REDACTED]

Prospects

The absence of the independent European Communist parties from Paris all but assures Moscow of a unanimous endorsement of its policies on disarmament, Afghanistan, and the international Communist movement. But the costs in attaining this bogus "unity" will be high. Rather than isolating the Italian and Spanish parties and improving the position of the French, the reverse is likely to be the result. Moreover, the failure of the Yugoslav and Romanian parties to attend will put new strains on their relationships with Moscow. [REDACTED]

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